

# A game changer: Using video to achieve high performance in the classroom

*The playbook for district and school leaders*



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## Introduction

For years, athletes have been reviewing practice and game film to develop strategies and refine techniques. The benefits of using video are now so clear to coaches that teams of all levels – from Little League to Major League – are taking advantage of the technology.

According to elite rugby coach Jim Dickin, “Video makes it possible for coaches and players to analyze performance objectively from the same perspective, without the passion of the game and all the distractions that come with it. Based on the evidence we see in the video, we craft a game plan to play to our strengths and avoid our weaknesses.”<sup>1</sup>

Beyond informing strategy and helping to capture movements missed in live action, video has been widely accepted in almost every sport as one of the best ways to improve muscle memory. The immediate feedback afforded by video allows athletes to make adjustments on the spot and leads to greater improvement over time.

**In fact, video gives coaches and athletes the same thing that all educators want – and need: relevant, actionable feedback that improves practices and promotes growth.**

But can video really work in schools?

In this SmartBrief report, developed in partnership with Insight Education Group, Insight CEO Michael Moody details how filming classroom instruction has the potential to transform teacher performance – and ultimately, student achievement – and what district and school leaders can do to make it happen.

### Four reasons educators want classroom video in observations and evaluations:



1. Instant replay for teacher and observer



2. Content-specific feedback



3. Fairness & accuracy of scoring



4. Approved in collective bargaining agreements

In a recent SmartBrief poll:

Nearly **70% of teachers** said that **traditional observation processes do not yield** the meaningful and actionable feedback **they need to grow.**

70%

Almost two-thirds of school leaders acknowledged that the **evaluation systems in place** at their schools are **not effective** in supporting **educators' development.**

62%



Almost **80%** of polled **teachers** would be willing to select and submit a video for a formal **observation.**



In a SmartBrief poll of educators:

91% felt that simply **filming their instruction** would help them **improve** their practices.



85% of school leaders said that using **video in observations** would help them **provide more meaningful feedback**.



### 5 benefits of video-based observation

Video, as part of teacher observations, enables educators to understand what effective instruction looks like.

Video-based observation provides teachers and observers opportunity to:

1. Identify areas for improvement and communicate more effectively with each other about goals, best practices, etc.
2. Give and receive personalized support specific to a teacher's grade level and content area.
3. Develop a shared understanding of high-quality instruction at the building and district levels and create a common language between observers and teachers.
4. Collaborate more effectively within professional learning communities (PLCs) by sharing effective techniques and receiving peer feedback and support.
5. Reflect on classroom practices and allow teachers to take action before sharing video with observers or peers.

## A losing record

The link between teacher quality and outcomes for students, specifically their chances of graduating high school and attending college, has been well established by current research.<sup>2</sup> According to the Center for Public Education, teacher quality has a greater impact on student achievement than most other factors often associated with academic outcomes, including a students' race, socioeconomic status, and prior academic record.<sup>3</sup>

In response, attention has naturally turned towards educator effectiveness. Putting particular emphasis on professional development and heightened standards for teacher observation and evaluation, more than two-thirds of states have made significant changes to teacher evaluation systems in the last five years.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, these efforts do not seem to be making the intended differences in teacher quality.

In a recent SmartBrief poll, nearly 70% of teachers said that traditional observation processes do not yield the meaningful and actionable feedback they need to grow.<sup>5</sup> And when school leaders were asked, almost two-thirds (62%) acknowledged that the evaluation systems in place at their schools are not effective in supporting educators' development.

It makes sense. Research from the "Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project" confirms that teaching and learning do not improve unless teachers get high-quality feedback from equitable and authentic observations by consistent evaluators.<sup>6</sup>

In order for teachers to grow from observation processes, feedback must be understood and accepted by teachers. Traditional observation and feedback processes are often replete with challenges and inadequacies, including subjective scoring and insufficient content expertise, making it hard for teachers to recognize them as valid and worthwhile.

## A new season

While there is a great deal of discouraging data on the efficacy of traditional observation and evaluation systems, research has highlighted the great promise of classroom video to help educators truly grow from these processes.

And even though video technology has not spread to every school and classroom yet, support for it among educators is rapidly rising. In a SmartBrief poll of teachers, 91% felt that simply filming their instruction would help them improve their practice, and 76% said they would be willing to select and submit a video for use in a formal evaluation.<sup>7</sup>

But it is not just teachers. Eighty-five percent of school leaders surveyed by SmartBrief said that using video in observations would help them provide teachers with more meaningful and actionable feedback.<sup>8</sup>

A survey by the Center for Education Policy Research found that **93% of teachers** thought videos provided an **accurate depiction** of their teaching and **88%** indicated that **watching videos** of their lessons **would change their practice.**<sup>9</sup>

## Georgia's Newton County School System: Common challenges, new solutions

When camera and audio systems were installed in classrooms across Newton County School System's 23 schools, district leaders were facing major, though common, challenges: new and heightened curricular expectations and declining student achievement scores – without enough professional support for teachers. But according to Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey, "We discovered video as an economical way to help address deficiencies in areas where we didn't have staff." District leaders decided to leverage the video technology for content-specific coaching from Insight Education Group's specialists.

It worked. Not only did teachers feel more supported than ever before, according to Fuhrey, student proficiency scores increased dramatically in just six months. Most notably, prior to the project, the district's high schools had a coordinate algebra pass rate of just 19%. After the project, however, these same schools showed improvement levels higher than the rest of the state. According to Fuhrey, "State movement was only about three points, but we improved as much as 15 points."

## Finding the winning edge

It is clear that, just like coaches and athletes, educators are excited about classroom video, seeing it as a tool with the unique ability to push practices to the next level and ultimately, make the difference for students.

And it is not difficult to understand why.

Classroom video has significant advantages to traditional systems, and can overcome many of the challenges that have plagued educator observations and evaluations for years.

**Acceptance.** Many teachers have a hard time accepting feedback not because they do not want it – research and poll data show they do – but because it is not accurate, reliable or relevant. However, video-based observations provide a common piece of evidence and a reference point for both teachers and observers. By making feedback more thoughtful, specific and objective, video helps teachers accept feedback and grow from it.

## Improving acceptance, empowering educators

According to research from the MET Project, acceptance of feedback improves when educators select the lessons they record and submit for evaluation. While this approach enables teachers to select what they see as their best lessons, teachers effectively raise their own bars and are more mindful of their own areas for improvement.

Notably, to date, there is no data showing that enabling teachers to select specific videos skews data or negatively impacts the quality of the overall observation and/or evaluation process.<sup>10</sup>

**Reliability.** Video removes much of the subjective nature of scoring by creating a concrete and consistent piece of evidence that can also be viewed by the teacher. Teachers are not left to simply interpret feedback on their own, and in the event of a dispute, the video can be reviewed again for specific, evidence-based dialogue. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence that using multiple observers and even qualified outside observers creates an ongoing check against bias.<sup>11</sup> Video helps make these practices possible, resulting in increased objectivity and reliability in scoring.

**Accuracy.** Accuracy is crucial to providing relevant and actionable feedback, yet most observation processes do not provide a full and clear picture of teachers' practices or classroom dynamics. Video, however, provides a more comprehensive view by enabling observers to pause and rewind. With more time to review the intricacies of a lesson, observers can go beyond looking at only the obvious.



**Specific feedback.** The “Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers” survey from The New Teacher Project (TNTP) found that only half of teachers feel they receive regular and relevant feedback on their practices.<sup>12</sup> Too often, teachers are evaluated by observers who lack sufficient expertise. This can be particularly problematic in middle and high schools, where content-area experience is key to providing meaningful feedback and support to teachers of specialized subjects. With recorded lessons, it is possible to send videos to content-area experts within the district, or even to qualified third-party observers.

**Time.** In “Leverage Leadership,” Paul Bambrick-Santoyo recommends that school leaders spend 25% of their time on observation and feedback.<sup>13</sup> While this is ideal, it is nearly impossible for most school leaders to achieve without the right tools and support. Video-based observations free observers from these constraints by providing flexibility in scheduling and completion. Administrators can establish timeframes for video submission and review to ensure adequate pacing and turn-around time to teachers.

## Maximizing time

Video observation enables evaluators to work more efficiently. “All of the teacher evaluation pieces require a great deal of time,” says Samantha Fuhrey, superintendent of Newton County School System in Georgia.

By giving teachers the option of posting videos for evaluators to assess, she says, “Observers can now view the footage at any time during the evaluation period. They don’t have to be present in the classroom, so they’re able to maximize their time.”

## The MET Project finds power in video

*“Our foundation has been working with 3,000 teachers in districts across the country on a project called ‘Measures of Effective Teaching.’ We had observers watch videos of teachers in the classroom and rate how they did on a range of practices. For example, did they ask their students challenging questions? Did they find multiple ways to explain an idea? And what we found is very exciting. First, the teachers who did well on these observations had far better student outcomes. And second, teachers in the program told us that these videos and these surveys from the students were very helpful diagnostic tools, because they pointed to specific places where they can improve.”<sup>14</sup>*

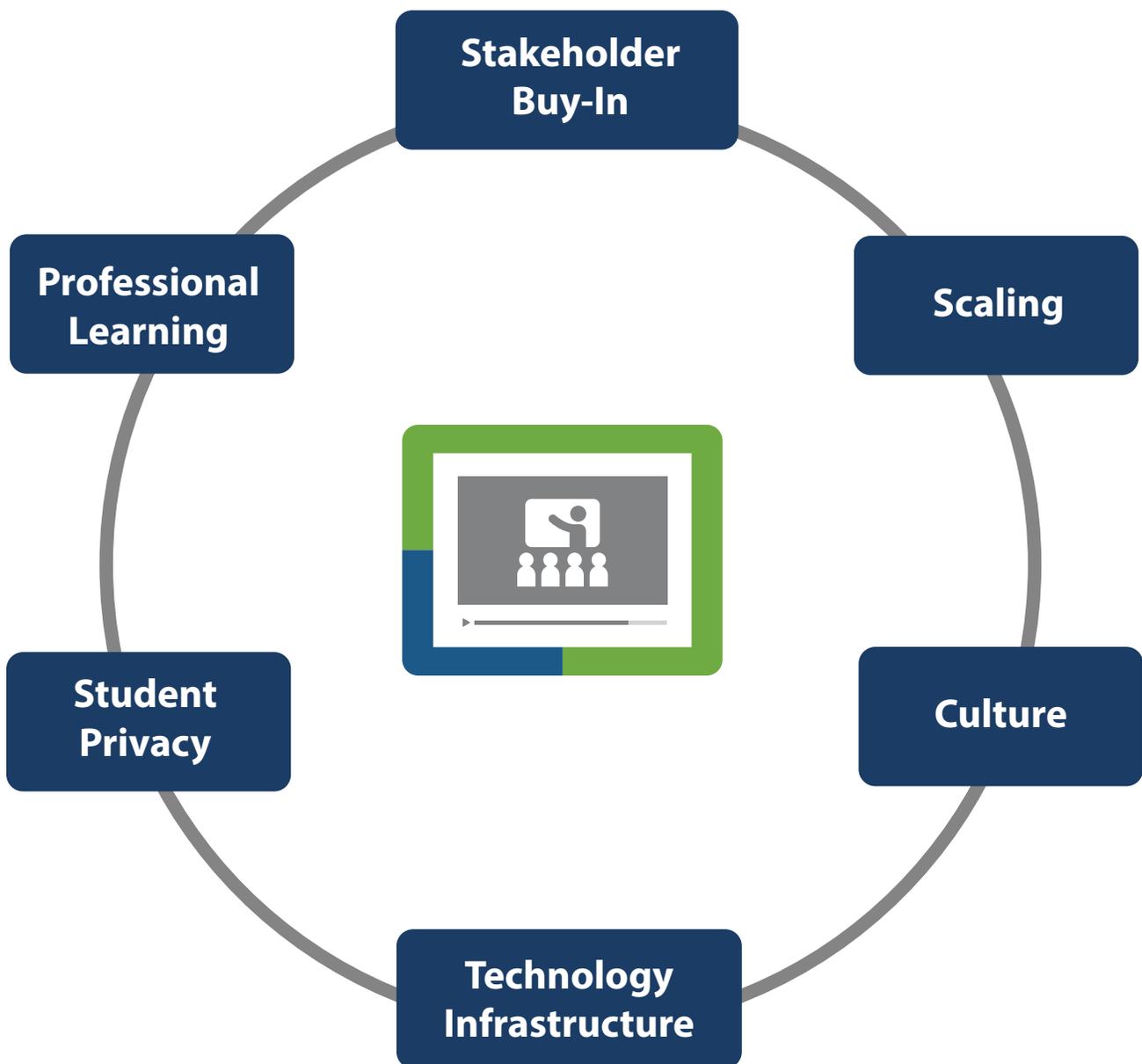
“Teachers Need Real Feedback”

Excerpted from Bill Gates’ TED Talk

# The playbook for school and district leaders

Despite an overwhelming interest in video among educators and clear benefits to observation and evaluation processes, implementing classroom video technology is not necessarily a simple or quick process.

As with any initiative, video for use in an educator observation system requires a thoughtful approach to implementation and must account for the following factors:



## 1 **Scale smart:** Be intentional about the who, what, when and where.

It is critical to start small and build up. There are many great uses for classroom footage – everything from self-reflection to formal observations – but it is important to focus on fully and effectively putting one application into practice at a time.

- ✓ Introduce the technology slowly. Install cameras in classrooms of teachers who are willing and positive about the systems. Ask these teachers to be ambassadors of the cameras and show other teachers how they can be used.
- ✓ Consider forming an early adopter group of enthusiastic teachers and observers who can become internal champions and resources for others.
- ✓ Prioritize uses for video, such as informal observations and PLCs, and be conscious about pacing implementation.
- ✓ Celebrate the best practices learned and provide ways to share these lessons with all participants.

## 2 **Generate buy-in:** Spread awareness and interest.

For implementation to be successful, stakeholders, including teachers, observers, school leaders, technology teams, parents and union officials must understand and appreciate the benefits of implementation.

- ✓ Be transparent about the use of the videos – how, when, and by whom they will be reviewed.
- ✓ Be sure teachers are in control of the cameras to avoid the feeling of “Big Brother” watching their every move.
- ✓ Look for ways to include video for observation purposes in union contracts. Several states and districts already allow for the use of classroom video in formal observations.<sup>15</sup>

## 3 **Determine funding sources:** Look across departments.

Because there can be multiple applications for classroom video technology, remember that funding may be acquired from multiple sources.

- ✓ Connect departments, including curriculum, educator effectiveness, instructional technology, operations, and human resources, to determine all possible funding sources.
- ✓ Seek grants and special programs. There are many available for instructional technology and innovative systems like classroom video.
- ✓ Consider options to cut costs, such as sharing hardware equipment.

## 4 Create the culture: Foster a spirit of innovation, collaboration and growth.

While classroom video is gaining in popularity among educators and recent data reflects rather widespread enthusiasm, it is important to realize some may not be immediately receptive to the technology. Prepare for resistance and reinforce the potential of video to spur growth.

- ✓ Share clear expectations for how video will be used.
- ✓ Be prepared for resistance.
- ✓ Ask for and listen to teachers' opinions and feedback about using video.
- ✓ Openly request teachers' cooperation throughout the process and challenge them to embrace new ideas and processes.
- ✓ Create a guide for teachers on best practices for filming.
- ✓ Incorporate video into professional development when appropriate and seek opportunities to share research on the benefits of video.
- ✓ Allow "trial runs" for observations at first. Do not use the scores for evaluations until teachers are used to the concept and comfortable with the cameras.

## 5 Establish an infrastructure: Choose technology carefully.

An obvious requirement of implementation is the technology. Audio and video equipment and storage should be selected with consideration towards budget, time, compatibility with other systems, and quality.

- ✓ Ensure that there is a specified team (likely the instructional technology specialists) that will oversee the details of installation, training, and troubleshooting.
- ✓ Explore the market for hardware. While there are many systems available – from mobile to fully integrated hardwired solutions – it is imperative that the system is easy to use and that the audio and video are high-quality.
- ✓ Consider video storage options, including where, who has access and how long you plan to store video. Video footage, especially high-definition footage, can create very large files.
- ✓ Ensure Internet connections and/or Wi-Fi can accommodate upload and download needs.
- ✓ Select a software platform with the features that match your purposes now and as you grow (hardware integration, integrated scheduling, artifact uploads, pre-observation surveys, evaluation management, video tagging etc).
- ✓ Choose a video storage platform that encrypts video and ensures only the right people have access to the video.
- ✓ Have a plan for storing mobile technology.

## 6 Protect student and staff privacy: Make a plan and anticipate initial concerns.

While there is minimal risk to students in using classroom video (in fact, it can increase school safety), some students and parents/guardians may not be receptive to the idea.

- ✓ Ensure all students have appropriate media release forms on file that specify audio and video recording for use in observation, evaluation and professional development. Often schools and districts will collect these at the beginning of the year.
- ✓ Consider providing school leaders and teachers with a template of a letter to parents/guardians explaining how video will be used to mitigate any concern or unease.
- ✓ Have a plan in place for students whose parents/guardians do not want them to participate in filming.

## Game time

Educators now face the challenge of ensuring every student is ready for college and career, but they need great support in order to make that happen.

Unfortunately, most teachers and school leaders agree that current observation and evaluation systems are not sufficient in promoting the development of effective practices.

As school leaders, we have an exciting opportunity to change this by looking for ways to provide professional growth experiences that connect feedback teachers receive in the observation process with real-time, meaningful professional learning.

Classroom video technology provides a new way to build these bridges between systems and get comprehensive support to our teachers. Just as athletes and coaches have come to rely on game film as a critical part of upping their game, now is the time to bring the benefits of video into the classroom.

*Michael Moody is the Founder and CEO of Insight Education Group. His experiences as a classroom teacher, school and district administrator and consultant have given him a unique perspective on both the challenges and opportunities in education today. He tweets at [@DrMichaelMoody](https://twitter.com/DrMichaelMoody)*

Download this paper at [www.InsightEducationGroup.com/GameChanger](http://www.InsightEducationGroup.com/GameChanger)

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